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ABSTRACT

Meant to be a practical guide for public relations educators and practitioners responsible for anticipating change and helping their organizations adapt, this guide presents 10 predictions and projected demographic data for the year 2000. Also included for each prediction in the guide are implications for public relations practice. The guide includes the following predictions: (1) the workforce will grow more slowly than at any time since the 1930s; (2) the average age of the American worker will rise; (3) the number of entry-level young workers will decrease; (4) immigrants and minorities will comprise a larger portion of the entering workforce; (5) women will continue their strong influence on organizations; (6) the United States will see an increased mismatch between workplace needs and workplace capabilities; (7) employers will have to consider potential workers from groups they once ignored; (8) small businesses will bear a disproportionate share of the effort; (9) work itself will continue to change; and (10) the nature of the worker's family is changing. (Twenty references are attached.) (RS)

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Panel: Managing the Internal Environment:
Trends and Tactics

# Tomorrow's Workers: A Peek at What Demographers See for Workforce 2000

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Public relations, at its heart, uses a problem-solving process. Its method and procedures are rooted in management theory and the social sciences. And, like our understanding of all processes, we can examine its structure while still acknowledging its flow through discrete steps.

One of those steps involves problem definition. Ideally one would like to identify potential problems before they become significant, sort of a pre-problem stage. In this sense, public relations counselors perform a boundary scanning function that helps the organization adapt to problems identified on the horizon.

This paper will scan the horizon and look for "blips" which stand out from the background noise. Some will change as we get closer. Some will disappear. A few will prove incredibly accurate. It's too early to know which will linger and which will disappear. Nonetheless, with some thought one should be able to predict with odds that are better than chance.

We are blessed, or perhaps cursed with a lot of predictions about what life will be like in the next century. Some are merely wishful thinking. Others use a confluence of trends, historical cycles or extrapolations of present-day information to suggest where we might be headed. All presume ceteris paribus conditions, i.e., holding other factors constant.

What follows is a list of predictions about workers based primarily on demographic data. Demographics was chosen as the predictor because much of tomorrow's data already shows up as today's **known** information. For example, how many 18-34 year old workers will there be in the year 2000? We can start with today's work force, add in present-day 8-20 year-olds, apply a factor for mortality and immigration and we'll be quite close.

As to traits like intelligence, worker values, native English-speakers, sex of worker, and the like, we are still able to predict with a fairly high degree of accuracy.

On the other hand, forecasters have a lot more difficulty sizing up the number of jobs and the specific skill levels required. One thing we can say with reasonable

certainty: the number of unskilled jobs is decreasing as the requirement for trained workers goes up.

So what are the numbers for the year 2000?

| | 1980 | 2000 |
|---|---|---|
| U.S. Population . . | 226 million | 275 million |
| U.S. Workforce . . | 107 million | 141 million |

(Opportunity 2000, p. 5)

This is meant to be a practical guide for public relations practitioners responsible for anticipating change and helping their organizations adapt. All the trends noted are available in public documents. Also included will be some implications for public relations practice. Those implications also presume trends toward consensus-building and establishing public relationships" (Kruckeberg & Stark, 1988).

**Prediction #1.** **The workforce will grow more slowly than at any time since the 1930s.**

**Projections:** By the year 2000 **population growth will drop** to 0.7 % per year, down from 1.9 % per year in the 1950s (Johnston & Packer, 1987).

- The growth in the **workforce will expand** less vigorously by about 1 % through the 1990s, down from nearly 3 % in the 1970s (Johnston & Packer, 1987).
- The majority of all new **jobs will require postsecondary education** (Workforce 2000, 1987).

**Implications:** Expect greater competition for workers at all but the lowest levels.

- The battle will be waged with pay, benefits and personal growth/actualization incentives.
- Workers will have more choices and be able to exercise those choices more freely.
- Organizations will need to create an environment in which workers will choose to stay.
- The government may alter immigration

regulations to attract skilled workers. o Organizations may choose to recruit actively outside the U.S., and among retirees and part-time workers.

- o Organizations which do not value and reward workers will be forced to settle for the least desirable workers.

**Prediction #2. The average age of the U.S. worker will rise.**

**Projections:** The average age of a typical worker will reach 39 by the year 2000, up from 36 in 1987 (Johnston & Packer, 1987).

- o This group will constitute a great reserve of trained and highly-educated people.
- o Life expectancy for Americans continues to grow.
- o The number of people 65 and over will increase 25 % in the next 20 years (King, 1989)
- o Federal regulations give workers and organizations flexibility to work past what was traditionally thought to be retirement age.
- o The number of people aged 45-59 will go up 40

% by the year 2000 (Morrison, 1990).

- **Medical costs** will consume 15 % of our GNP, up from 11.5 % today (Winslow, 1989).
- **Only one in 50 will make top management,** compared to one in 20 in 1987 (Arnett, 1989).

**Implications:** Older workers will demand a re-examination of employee benefit plans. We will likely see a wider range of options catering to worker's needs.

- Retraining costs will be picked up by the organization as organizations find the cost of worker turnover prohibitive.
- Little room at the top as workers continue to work beyond the traditional retirement age.
- People will leave to join smaller entrepreneural firms where there is room for advancement.
- Older workers put down roots and will be less likely to move. Some may resist retraining.

**Prediction #3. The number of entry-level young workers will decrease.**

**Projections:** The **number of young workers** (age 16-24) will **fall 8 %**, a drop of 2 million workers (Johnston & Packer, 1987).

- Because of low U.S. birthrates in the late 70's, we will have a **smaller pool of native born American workers** after the year 2000.
- "America's GNP may now grow only about 2 % a year, a result of minimal productivity gains and *a shortage of new workers*" (Dentzer, p. 23).
- By the year 2000, **white males** will make up **only 15 % of the** *new workers* entering the workforce, down from 47 % in 1987 (Workforce 2000, 1987).

**Implications:** Intense competition to recruit young workers --especially by the armed forces which depends solely on this cohort for enlistees.

- Since about 70 % of eligible working-age women will already be in the workforce, few will be added from this group (Morrison,

1990).

- Shortfall will come from older employees and emigrants.
- Organizations will have to account for a greater cultural diversity in the workforce
- Worker's values and the associated work ethic will subtilely change the organization's environment.
- The "old boy" network, where it still exists, will yield to other patterns of advancement.
- Immigrants will bring different assumptions about the nature of work and organizational rules.
- Recruiters will find it more difficult to attract what has traditionally been the "ideal" candidates, forcing a redefinition of the "ideal" candidate.

**Prediction #4.** **Immigrants and minorities will comprise a larger proportion of the entering workforce.**

**Projections:** **The fastest growing job sector will be in professional, technical and sales fields--areas requiring the highest education**

(Workforce 2000, 1988).

- The Congress is now considering removing limits on emigrants with specific job skills. (Commercial Appeal, 1990)

Implications: Immigrants will be more visible in the workforce because they "look different."

- Non-whites will comprise 29 % of new entrants into the workforce between now and 2000, a doubling since 1987 (Johnston & Packer, 1987).
- Immigrants will constitute the largest share of the increase--more than double the 1987 share (Johnston & Packer, 1987).
- We cannot assume our oral and written communication will be understood and acted upon in traditional ways.
- May have to change signs, manuals, simplify some equipment.
- The culture of organizations will change as we see greater cultural diversity in the workforce.
- Values will change with cultural diversity.
- Organizations will be called upon to be

tolerant of non-Christian religions and excuse workers for religious holidays.

**Prediction #5. Women will continue their strong influence on organizations.**

Projections: Over 70 % of all women in their 20s to 40s are now in the work force (Morrison, 1990).

- Around 60 % of women in their 50s are now in the labor force (Morrison, 1990).
- The sheer number of women in the pipeline will "guarantee that 20 years from now some of these women will be senior partners, chiefs of staff, CEOs" (Wage Hikes.., 1989 p. 52).
- Both spouses will work in 75 % of the households, up from 51 % in 1988 (Koenenn, 1988).
- 61 % of all women over the age of 16 will work in the year 2000 (Johnston & Packer, 1987).

Implications: Policies, benefit packages, perks still reflect the needs of a society where men

worked and women looked after the home and family.

- Convenience industries will grow around the tasks man and women no longer choose to do with their increasingly limited time.
- Expect continued demand for time off for pregnancy, parenting responsibilities and care for the elderly.
- Women CEOs will redefine our definitions of success and the role of women in the workplace.

Prediction #6. **The U.S. will see an increased mismatch between workplace needs and workplace capabilities.**

Projections: 25 % of high school aged youngsters drop out of high school annually (Graham, 1989).

- Another 25 % will graduate with only marginal skills, "unprepared for anything but the most menial skills" (Graham, 1989).
- 41 % of jobs created through the end of the century will be "high skill," verses 24 % today (Bennett, 1989).

- By 2000, a **majority of all new jobs will require postsecondary education**--up from a third today (Johnston & Packer, 1987).
- Only 27 % of all new jobs will go to **those** in the **lowest two skill levels** (Johnston & Packer, 1987).
- "The **fastest growing jobs** will be in professional, technical and sales fields requiring the **highest education** and skill levels" (Johnston & Packer, p. xxi).
- Some **workers** with **critical skills** may **retire** at an increasingly rapid rate" (PR Reporter, 1986).
- **New production methods** require **decision making** at the **lowest levels** (Dentzer, 1990).
- The **cost** to **educate** one million **workers** in basic skills costs $25 billion (Allen, 1989).

Implications: Businesses may become even more active in education issues and support of our schools.

- Pressure to increase productivity will intensify.
- Organizations will seek to substitute technology for people as productivity gains

become more difficult.

- Larger shares of personnel costs will be spent on recruiting and retaining able workers.
- Organizations will seek applications for artificial intelligence to compensate for worker's low skill levels.

Prediction #7. **Employers will have to consider potential workers from groups they once ignored.**

Projections: An estimated 3 - 4 million adults (about 3 %) will have **serious problems with basic skills.** (Chisman, 1989).

- Another 20 - 30 million adults (about 20 %) have **not mastered basic skills** well enough to function effectively in the work environment (Chisman, 1989).
- "Of the estimated $ 30 billion spent on corporate training each year, only a small fraction is devoted to basic skills" (Chisman, 1989, p. 10).

**Implications:** Recruiters will consider groups once overlooked: the disabled, older and retied workers, substance abusers, ex-offenders, the illiterate and homebound single parents.

**Prediction #8. Small businesses will bear a disproportionate share of the effort.**

**Projections:** "Most American workers are employed by small firms and almost all new job creation is in the small business sector" (Chisman, 1989, p. 11).

- 85 % of the workforce will be working for organizations with fewer than 200 workers (Arnett, 1989).
- Manufacturing jobs will account for less than 17 % of all jobs by 2000, down from 30 % in 1955 (Johnston & Packer, 1987).
- 88 % of workers will be in the service sector, up from 67 % in 1980 (Koenenn, 1988)
- The service industry will create most new jobs by the year 2000 (Johnston & Parker, 1987).

**Implications:** We will see more public-private partnerships to raise literacy standards.

- Organizations will consider transporting workers to the workplace from remote locations.
- Service industries will adapt to the needs of customers, e.g., evening and weekend service calls and deliveries.
- We may see attempts to increase competition in service industries in an effort to raise productivity, especially in education, health care, government, and the post office.

**Prediction #9.** Work itself will continue to change.

**Projections:** A person born today can expect to change careers on average of once every 10 years (Koenenn, 1988).

- Knowledge is doubling every 20 months (Koenenn, 1989).

**Implications:** At least one futurist, Frank Ogden, predicts the demise of unions by 2001 (Koenenn, 1989).

- Unions may survive by filling the needs of

previously neglected groups.

- Robotics will continue to be important for productivity gains in industry.
- Organizations will experiment even more with job- and time-sharing arrangements.

**Prediction #10.** **The nature of the worker's family is changing.**

Projections: We will see smaller families (4.5 persons in 1910, to an estimated 2.5 by year 2000 (Morrison, 1990).

- We will see more single parent with children families living alone (Morrison, 1990).
- While there is a slight increase in female-headed households among white and Hispanic women, the rate is rapidly accelerating for Blacks (Morrison, 1990).

Implications: Increased need for child care to attract qualified women into the workforce.

- Organizations will continue to experiment with flex time to keep quality and productivity at acceptable levels.

- Organizations will deal with "parenting" issues (to include fathers).
- More employers will be called upon to address issues, such as, child care, drug abuse, care for the elderly, broken homes, teen pregnancies.
- Employees will provide "mental health days" or flexible leave to allow workers to relieve stress (Outlook '90 and Beyond, 1989).
- Employees will provide "eldercare benefits" to assist workers who must care for older relatives (Outlook '90 and Beyond, 1989)
- We will see an increase in two-generation geriatric families--children in their 60s and 70s caring for parents in their 90s" (Outlook '90 and beyond, 1989).
- Couples will be recruited as a "team."
- Organizations will be pressed to finance long-term custodial care for the elderly.

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